

Markey Statement Introducing H.Con.Res. 177, Aug. 5, 1999:

**Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey
Introducing the Nuclear Weapons De-alerting Resolution
August 5, 1999**

Mr. Speaker, fifty-four years ago tomorrow a single bomb in a single city changed our world. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima leveled the city, engulfed the rubble in a fireball, and killed 100,000 people. Three days later another 70,000 people died at Nagasaki, and people are still dying today from leukemia and other remnants of those explosions.

The victims of Hiroshima cast shadows from the explosion's blinding light that were permanently etched not only in the remaining buildings but also in our souls. Since August 6th, 1945 we have lived in fear that such nuclear destruction would happen again, perhaps in the United States. Today, the accidental launch of a single missile with multiple warheads could kill 600,000 people in Boston, or 3,000,000 people in New York, or 700,000 people in San Francisco or right here in Washington, DC. If that missile sparked a nuclear exchange, the result would be worldwide devastation.

For forty years of Cold War we played a game of nuclear chicken with the Soviet Union, racing to make ever more nuclear bombs, praying that the other side would turn aside. During the Cuban missile crisis and many other times we came perilously close to going over the cliff. Then in 1991 the Cold War and the Soviet Union ended. Yet today we not only keep hundreds of nuclear missiles with nowhere to point them, we keep many of them ready to fire at a moment's notice.

The threat from this "launch-on-warning" policy is real. On January 25, 1995, when Russian radar detected a launch off the coast of Norway, Boris Yeltsin was notified and the "nuclear briefcase" activated. It took eight minutes—just a few minutes before the deadline to respond to the apparent attack—before the Russian military determined there was no threat from what turned out to be a U.S. scientific rocket. The U.S. is not immune: on November 9, 1979 displays at four U.S. command centers all showed an incoming full-scale Soviet missile attack. After Air Force planes were launched it was discovered that the signals were from a simulation tape.

And the danger of an accidental nuclear war is growing. The Russian command and control system is decaying. Power has repeatedly been shut off in Russian nuclear weapons facilities because they couldn't afford to pay their electricity bills. Communications at their nuclear weapons centers have been disrupted because thieves stole the cables for their copper. And at New Years the "Y2K" bug in computers that are not programmed to recognize the year 2000 could cause monitoring screens to go blank or even cause false signals.

There is no reason to run the terrible risk of an accidental nuclear war. It is hard today to imagine a "bolt out of the blue" sudden nuclear attack. And even if the U.S. was devastated by an attack, the thousands of nuclear warheads we have on submarines would survive unscathed. Keeping weapons on high alert is an intemperate response to an implausible event. Mr. Speaker, it is time to take a large step away from the brink of nuclear war, to take our nuclear weapons off of hair-trigger alert. Today I am introducing a resolution that expresses the sense of Congress that we should do four things:

- We should immediately remove some nuclear weapons from high alert.
- We should study methods to further slow the firing of all nuclear weapons.
- We should use these unilateral measures to jump-start an eventual agreement with Russia and

other nuclear powers to take all weapons off of alert.

- And we should quickly establish a joint U.S.-Russian early warning center before the Year 2000 turnover.

These are not new or radical ideas. President George Bush in 1991 ordered an immediate standdown of nuclear bombers and took many missile off of alert. President Gorbachev reciprocated a week later by deactivating bombers, submarines, and land-based missiles. Leading security experts including former Senator Sam Nunn, former Strategic Air Command chief Gen. Lee Butler, and a National Academy of Sciences panel have endorsed further measures to take weapons off of high alert. Two thirds of Americans in a 1998 poll support taking all nuclear forces off alert, and this week I received a petition signed by 270 of my constituents from Lexington, Massachusetts calling on the President to de-alert nuclear missiles.

I urge my colleagues to join together to cosponsor this resolution. The best way we can commemorate the anniversary of the nuclear explosion at Hiroshima is to make sure we will never blunder into an accidental nuclear holocaust.